

THE

# HISTORIAN



OF HANCOCK COUNTY

[www.hancockcountyhistoricalsociety.com](http://www.hancockcountyhistoricalsociety.com)

Bay Saint Louis, Mississippi

August 2024

## COMING EVENTS AT LOBRANO HOUSE

The monthly luncheon meeting will be held on Thursday, August 15, 2024, at noon at the Kate Lobrano House. The guest speaker will be Robert O'Dell who will speak on coast Indian artifacts. **Reservations are required** and may be made by calling 228-467-4090. **Please call by noon on Wednesday, August 14**, to make your reservation. Seating is limited to forty-eight (48) people, and we need to order the correct number of lunches. **Served at noon, lunch is \$15.00 for members and \$17.00 for nonmembers**, payable at the door. The catering order is submitted on Wednesday at noon prior to the luncheon on Thursday. If you need to cancel your reservation, please call by noon on Wednesday prior to the luncheon if at all possible so that the society does not incur unnecessary expenses. It is catered by Almost Home Catering with Chef Michelle Nichols. The lunch menu is lasagna, Caesar salad, breadsticks/garlic salad, and éclair cake.

## ANNUAL CEMETERY TOUR

The Annual Cemetery Tour will be held on Halloween night, Thursday, October 31, 2024. Needed are volunteers to prepare the cemetery for the tour, to portray citizens buried there, and to act as guides. To volunteer, please call 228-467-4090. All actors and guides must be members of the Historical Society.



This photograph reveals the internal anatomy of a step-type seawall under construction. Note the pouring of concrete into a wood mold containing a robust network of steel rebar rods.

## SEAWALL

By

James Keating, M.D.

A seawall is a hard engineering, shore-based structure that protects the coast from erosion from waves, tides, or tsunamis. Seawalls are constructed from reinforced concrete, boulders, steel or gabions. The ancient Greeks and Romans built seawalls made out of poured concrete. Seawalls have been described as the "Armor of Paradise."

In the 1920's in Hancock County, the automobile was becoming a more frequent addition to the landscape. This innovation required infrastructure such as

roads and bridges. The Gulf Coast was enjoying the beginning of an economic transformation as a beach resort destination. A national project called the Old Spanish Trail created Highway 90 that passed through Hancock and Harrison counties. A road along the coast needed protection from erosion.

The State of Mississippi passed legislation in 1924 calling for the protection of public highways along the shore. A Seawall Tax of three cents per gallon of gasoline was approved. Hancock, Harrison, and Jackson counties passed such a tax. The proceeds of the seawall tax was used to retire bonds and provide for the maintenance of the seawall.

Mississippi built a twenty-six-mile, Dutch design, stair-step, concrete seawall to protect the Old Spanish Trail or Highway 90 in Har-

# THE HISTORIAN

OF HANCOCK COUNTY

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## LOBRANO HOUSE HOURS

MONDAY — FRIDAY  
10:00AM — 3:00PM  
CLOSED 12—1 (lunch)

**Closed: 12:00—1:00 (lunch)**

## MISSION STATEMENT

“TO PRESERVE THE GENERAL AND ARCHITECTURAL HISTORY OF HANCOCK COUNTY AND TO PRESERVE THE KATE LOBRANO HOUSE AND COLLECTIONS THEREIN; TO RESEARCH AND INTERPRET LIFE IN HANCOCK COUNTY; AND TO ENCOURAGE AN APPRECIATION OF AND INTEREST IN HISTORICAL PRESERVATION.”

risson County. It was called the “world’s longest seawall” and was completed in 1928. After it was completed, property values shot up and more people were building vacation homes on the Gulf Coast. Erosion claimed most of the beach in front of this seawall until the natural disaster of the Hurricane of 1947. Subsequently, the Army Corps of Engineers undertook a nourishment project of the beaches dredging seven million cubic yards of sand. Now Mississippi bragged that it had both the longest seawall and the longest man-made beach in the world. Jack Davis wrote in his book, *The Gulf*, the following short passage: “Unfortunately, it was discovered that if humans put a beach where nature didn’t, it was common for Mother Nature to steal it. Dikes, jetties, causeways, passes, seawalls—all intended to solve a navigation or water problem, almost always economic related-created, in nearly every instance, a land erosion problem.”

Hancock County enjoys a shoreline on Lake Borgne that stretches from the Bay St. Louis to the East Pearl River. Shoreline erosion is caused by incessant wind and wave action, flooding, inadequate drainage, and beach attrition. In the early Twentieth Century, it was deemed propitious to protect the eastern shoreline of the county with a seawall. West of Bayou Caddy, the shoreline is entirely low salt marsh. Consequently, considerable residential development has taken place in Hancock County near the coast east of Bayou Caddy, while development westward of Bayou Caddy has not occurred, and it is unlikely that development will occur in the future.

The early seawall in Hancock County before Hurricane Katrina in 2005 consisted of a variety of wall types and configurations. Between 1915 and 1920 St. Stanislaus College and the City of Bay St. Louis built a primitive vertical seawall that protected only the

downtown business district. Between 1926 and 1928 the County erected a series of step-type seawalls with an adjoining roadway called Beach Boulevard. The aggregate cost of this project was \$1.2M. Efforts to establish an adjoining beach in this time frame were unsuccessful. Maintenance of the seawall was limited to essential repair work after episodes of intense flooding.

In 1946 Congress enacted Public Law 727 to protect coastal communities and help control erosion. This law promoted the construction of artificial beaches in front of areas that had seawalls. After Hurricane Betsy in 1965, the Federal Office of Emergency Preparedness made repairs to the local seawalls, and in 1967 pumped sand in places creating a 6.1-mile stretch of protective sand beach in front of the seawall that stretched from Clermont Harbor to Bay St. Louis, which is still present.

From 1852 until 1928 the shoreline next to Bayou Caddy suffered the most erosion or recession. The seawall of 1928 fixed the position of the shoreline by and large. However, the erosion of the natural beach exposed the seawalls to underlying tidal forces. The waves scour the base, reaching underneath and behind the seawall. Lack of adequate drainage can cause a seawall to buckle, move, bow, crack, or collapse. These seawalls developed cracks in vulnerable sites causing settling and shifting of the wall and/or decay of untreated timber supports. These defects allowed leakage of sand back-fill from behind the seawall and under the adjacent roadway. In general, the seawalls maintained their integrity through Hurricane Camille in 1969. However, by 1985, the collective wear and tear of multiple storms and years of wave action revealed the need for a new seawall with better shore protective devices.

Nevertheless, no new seawall was built before Hurricane



A high seawall built after Hurricane Katrina is protected by an artificial beach.

Katrina in 2005. In 2010, the US Army Corps of Engineers started a long-awaited, multimillion dollar shoreline projection project. A new giant seawall was designed to protect Beach Boulevard and nearby houses and buildings from future storms. The new seawall spanned 1.7 miles from the Bay Bridge to Washington Street. Construction of the step-type seawall required 16,000 cubic yards of concrete, 600 tons of reinforcing steel, and 60,000 cubic yards of beach sand that provided protection of the wall's base. In the northern part of the project, the seawall will be seven feet in elevation. Yet, in the downtown section, where it will do the most-good, the seawall reaches a height of twenty-four feet. A Ribbon-Cutting Ceremony occurred April 4, 2012, hosted by the US Army Corps of Engineers, Hancock County, the State of Mississippi, and the City of Bay St. Louis. The Mayor of Bay St. Louis at the time was Les Fillingame.

The Seawall and Sand

Beach Department of Hancock County maintains the beach, seawall, piers, walkways, and adjacent roads. This department also maintains the Hancock County Marina on Bayou Caddy.

The Bay Harbor was completed in 2014 in front of the downtown seawall. A Harbor Commission oversees management of this municipal harbor. The original project offered 163 slips for boats. The marina has been so popular and financially successful that an additional two piers have been constructed increasing the capacity to 201 slips. Amenities include electrical and waste service connections, full-service restrooms with showers, fuel dock with diesel and non-ethanol gasoline, sewer pump-out stations, 24-hour security, and a 155 x 60-foot event deck.

In conclusion, the Hancock County economy has evolved over the last century from a poor-agrarian marketplace to a robust, modern financial system. The ingredients of success include a

steady increase of population, significant investment in infrastructure, and continued construction of factories, commercial buildings, and houses. The prudent decision to build and maintain seawalls along the coast, which represent infrastructure was a critical factor in achieving the goal of developing the Bay-Waveland community into a booming beach resort destination. In other communities this growth has created tensions between citizens. Some embraced this growth, while others voted for protection. Historically, seawalls promote condominiums. In Florida, they call this development "condo canyons." The Twenty-First Century will probably see more change than was witnessed in the last century. Ralph Waldo Emerson said "progress is the activity of today and the assurance of tomorrow."

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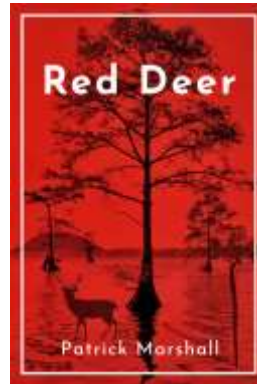
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